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IN CONVERSATION

How Has E. Jean Carroll's Life Been Since Accusing Donald Trump? "Fabulous. Buoyant."

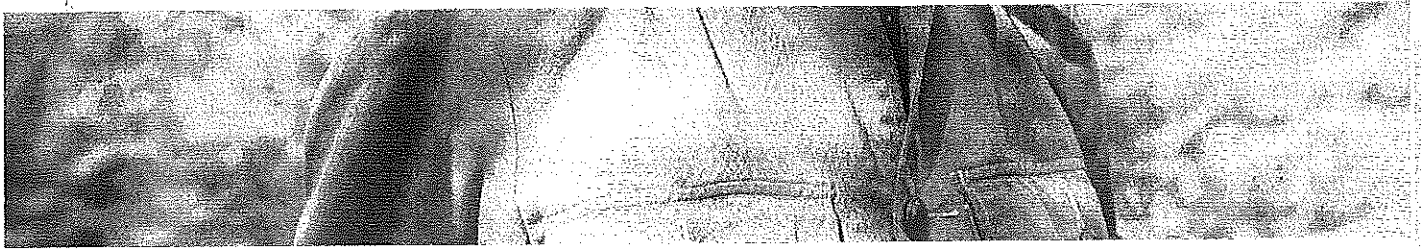
It's been a week since the longtime advice columnist accused Donald Trump of attacking her. In a wide-ranging interview, the author discusses how she decided to go public, the support of her friends, and so much more.



BY KEZIAH WEIR

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“**B**ad fellows have done bad things to your advice columnist,” E. Jean Carroll writes early on in *What Do We Need Men For? A Modest Proposal* (St. Martin’s), her new book that functions as a memoir by way of an old-fashioned American road trip. As she traverses America interviewing strangers for the titular answer, she recalls a series of unpleasant interactions with men, which she catalogues in the “Most Hideous Men of My Life List.” In the book she alleges that **Donald Trump** violently assaulted her in a Bergdorf Goodman dressing room about 23 years ago.

For the past 26 years, Carroll has served as a columnist for *Elle* magazine (where I was her colleague for about four and a half years) and, she says, most of her answers to all manner of questions are variations on a theme: Get rid of him. A husband holds petty grudges? If he doesn’t shape up, “chuck him in the clink.” A male employee is sending inappropriate emails? Turn him over to H.R. She came up with a plan to reduce all the world’s men to their composite elements—hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, etc.—“put those elements to better use,” and take the \$170 million or so to buy, she says, 11 or 12 Birkin bags. Should I mention Carroll is a satirist?

Her writing also includes the 1993 biography *Hunter: The Strange and Savage Life of Hunter S. Thompson*, a dive into the world of NBA groupies for *Esquire*, and a piece for *Spin* that charts a string of murders and accidental deaths within a group of cheerleaders and athletes in a small New York town. (A story that at least 15 film companies have tried to option—she’s turned them down; the central figure is her niece.) The “E” in “E. Jean” stands for Elizabeth, a name she gave herself after growing up as Betty Jean. She lives in a cabin she calls “the Mouse House,” surrounded by trees with trunks she’s painted a striking shade of pale blue. When she embarks on her road trip, in a Prius named Miss Bingley, she leaves behind her cat, Vagina T. Fireball, but

takes her now-departed standard poodle, Lewis Carroll, whose pompadour was also dyed blue.

Carroll's 21 hideous men include three who attempted to or succeeded in throwing her to the ground and molesting her, all before she turned 15. They also include Trump, who she says forcibly penetrated her in a dressing room at Bergdorf; **Les Moonves**, who she says groped her following an interview for *Esquire* (both Trump and Moonves have denied her accusations); and Roger Ailes, a former friend who joined the list when the allegations of sexual harassment broke in 2016. Her second husband, **John Johnson**, who allegedly strangled her—"J.J. has apologized four or five times for his past behavior," she writes—is on the list. (Johnson declined to comment when reached by the *New York Times*.) In Arkansas a man drives by in a truck and asks if she is fucking her dog. He's on the list too.

No reader of Carroll's column will be surprised to find that such violent moments are interspersed with huge helpings of levity. She recalls an interview with **Fran Lebowitz**: "I asked if a woman's purpose in life was to find the perfect man. Fran said no. A woman's quest in life should be to find the perfect apartment." At the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York, one can pay \$100 to have a plaque put up in honor of a woman, a copy of which is then sent to that woman. Carroll sends one to **Melania Trump** that reads: "For Idiocies Suffered as a Result of Being Donald Trump's First Lady."

Last week, *New York* ran a cover excerpt of *What Do We Need Men For?*, breaking the allegation against Trump. The president first responded in a written statement that read, in part, "I've never met this person in my life." (A circa-1987 photograph is included in the article and Carroll's book, in which Carroll, her then-husband Johnson, Trump, and his then-wife **Ivana** appear to be in conversation.) He has since told the *Hill*, "I'll say it with great respect: Number one, she's not my type. Number two, it never happened." Carroll writes that she told two of her friends about what she calls the "fight" soon after it happened. (They corroborated her story in a *Times* article published Thursday.) Here, in an interview with *Vanity Fair*, she talks about her book, hideous men, and the past week in her life.

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***Vanity Fair*: Who have been your sources of advice over the years?**

E. Jean Carroll: Henry David Thoreau, the great P.G. Wodehouse, Jane Austen. Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius—seriously, Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus and Henry David Thoreau, that’s the block. P.G. Wodehouse because nothing gets Bertie Wooster down. And that is it. I go to my friends. Each one has a category. **[Lisa] Birnbach** gives me career advice, and **Carol Martin** gives me personal advice. I went to **Robbie [Myers]**, the past editor of *Elle* magazine. Robbie never steered me wrong.

Tell me about Carol Martin and Lisa Birnbach going public as the two women you talked to.

It was very difficult in this world, where it’s so divided, to convince two of my very closest friends. And they always say, “Anything you want, E. Jean, we will do to support you. Anything.” But to actually ask them to go on the record was a step that neither of them wanted to take. It took **Megan Twohey** of the *Times*, Miss Big Foot Pulitzer, who is one of the most wonderful people who ever walked or crawled the earth. It took her five days. And finally Lisa Birnbach called her best friend. I think I’m her best friend, but she called probably her real best friend, **Jamie Lee Curtis**, and Jamie Lee said, “Why are you hesitating? What’s the big deal? Speak on the record. That’s it.” After talking with her family, and after talking with her **partner**, and after talking with everybody she could talk to.

You write in the book that the original proposal didn’t include your personal experiences, which include the accusations. Was there anybody you consulted as you shifted it into what it became?

No, no. Reading letters for 26 years from women, it made no difference whether it was about their careers, or their kids, or their love lives, or their outfits, or their weight, or their orgasm—it didn’t matter. There comes a line in almost every single letter where the cause of the woman’s problem is revealed, and that cause is men. And so year after year, all I do is sit there and say, “Get rid of him. Get rid of him. Get rid of him. Get rid of him.”

I ran out of ways to say, "Get rid of him." So I just figured out one day, let's just get rid of the buggers. And so I came up with a plan for doing away with the male sex. But I had to find out, before we get rid of them forever, do we need them for anything? So I hit the road. Only went to towns named after women, only ate in cafes named after women, only wore clothes designed by women, fed my dog **Rachael Ray** dog food. We took it to the extreme. And then I get out of the car in the town named after a woman and ask people, "What do we need men for?" And boy, the answers were just juicy. I had the best book in the world. And then of course, all hell broke loose when Megan Twohey and **Jodi Kantor** dropped the **Harvey Weinstein** bomb in the *New York Times*. Remember how the country rose up? The women? We all knew guys like this. **So then you decided that you were going to include your own personal stories about your own hideous men, which is such an interesting play on David Foster Wallace's *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*.**

He turns out to be a hideous man. One of our favorite writers, one of the great writers. He tried to throw her from a car. He got a gun and was going to shoot her boyfriend or her ex-husband. He threw a table at her. We're talking about **Mary Karr**, who has stated this herself in her Twitter. Our god, David Foster Wallace.